

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS' ROUNDTABLE WITH CAPTAIN DAVID R. PINE, CHIEF OF STAFF, JOINT HEADQUARTERS TRANSITION TEAM SUBJECT: DEVELOPING A DEDICATED LOGISTICS PROGRAM FOR THE IRAQI ARMY MODERATOR: CHARLES J. "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 10:30 A.M. EST DATE: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2007

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MR. HOLT: Okay, Colonel Williams, if Captain Pine's ready, we can go ahead and get started.

CAPT. PINE: Fantastic.

This is Captain David Pine. Good morning. I'm the chief of staff of the Joint Headquarters Transition Team -- one of the many transition teams and training teams underneath the MNSTC-I umbrella -- Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq. Our mission as JHQT is to advise and support the Iraqi joint headquarters as they develop the institutional capacity to be a strategic-level, self-reliant and effective headquarters; that they command, generate and sustain the Iraqi joint forces in accordance with their national military strategy.

The way we accomplish that is by concentrating on really three things: The generation of forces; the replenishment of forces; and probably most importantly, building and enhancing the capacity of the joint headquarters as they complete those Title X responsibilities, if you will -- to put it in our parlance -- of raise, train, sustain, or man, train and equip the force. The supporting effort, of course, is providing advice and coaching and mentorship to help them as they implement this counterinsurgency force structure to ensure the operational success in the COIN fight.

The end-state, obviously, that we're looking for is to work ourselves out of a job over time where the joint headquarters has the capacity and the ability and the structure -- those basically policies, procedures and processes -- in place, functioning and effective so that they can execute the government Iraq national security directives.

Well, how do we get there? Our team of about 50 or so provides advice and mentorship, coaching and guidance to the key leaders inside the joint headquarters -- predominately at the chief of staff, vice chief of staff and deputy chief of staff level. With that, I'll pause and take your questions.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

And Andrew Lubin, you were first online. Why don't you get us started?

Q Great, Captain. Good afternoon. Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cav. On Point. Appreciate you taking the time to speak with us today.

CAPT. PINE: You bet.

Q Sir, a lot of logistics -- mostly logistics -- (inaudible). It's the ability to think a day, a week, a month or six months ahead. Is there an educational or a cultural problem with the IA logistics just running correctly or is this something that they can be taught over a two-week or four-week class?

CAPT. PINE: I think -- I would hesitate to say there was a cultural or other barrier that has folks with issues or difficulties thinking ahead, as you say. To put it in an analogy, right now the entire Iraqi defense forces kind of have their hands full with that near five or 10-meter -- (inaudible). Our goal here is -- while they're engaged fully to the hilt in the counterinsurgency battle -- to help the joint headquarters build the capacity, build the -- get the functions, those processes in place so it puts a lot of the day-to-day things on autopilot so that they have more time to think ahead, to think further ahead and look downrange for that -- the ability to do more than just react.

It's a challenge when you're building a force as rapidly as we are, building the headquarters capacity while they're in the midst of, obviously, a very severe struggle. So our goal and our objective is to help them with their execution of the near-term, close day-to-day things, while also helping them keep one eye on the longer-ranged target. And it is a challenge, but it's one thing that, after being on the ground here for 10 months, I see they get better at -- slowly, but they get better at all the time.

Q Well, if I could follow up then, quickly: Did they not have enough people? Because what we were hearing back in June and July when the surge really took off is the IAs were going into battle and running ammunition, running out of fuel, running out of water, because the people in the back hadn't thought ahead to order it. That's about as near battle as you're going to get and they weren't doing it.

CAPT. PINE: Yeah. I think that's not exactly true. It's not that they're running out ammunition, running out of fuel, running out of water because, you know, the rear echelon guys weren't thinking about it. They have a very difficult process by which those things are approved. And as you might imagine, unlike our decentralized execution that we have in the western side, it's not that way here. They hold a lot of things at high levels for authority. The things that you would normally think would be delegated maybe to a corps, a division, a brigade, a battalion in the U.S. are retained at the very highest levels, because that's the culture. They don't want to give up the power.

But I will tell you -- and this is new information to me just in the last couple of days -- the new deputy chief of staff for logistics who used to be the deputy commander -- I think it was the deputy commander down at IGFC -- is really thinking ahead and really wants to push delegations for approving of some of those very same items you just mentioned, those commodities, to a lower level. Getting them outside of the joint headquarters and approve that.

Obviously, things like ammunition and fuel -- ammunition is not in short supply, but fuel is by the nature of the high demand and the inability to keep up with allocations -- is that those are retained at high levels now. But what the joint headquarters is trying to do is push that down to IGFC or lower so that, in fact, the paperwork, if you will, that's required to get approval to

issue those kind of items doesn't have to come all the way up to the joint headquarters in Baghdad. As you may or may not be aware, they have a mostly paper-based society here. And so to get signatures -- and we're talking tens of signatures -- on forms to release some of that gear can be painfully slow in getting.

Now, I will tell you, they do have things like emergency ammunition requests. Ability to do it via phone call. So if somebody, no kidding, needs ammunition on the front lines for the Iraqis, they can get it in 24 to 48 hours. And there's a process in place. They know how to do it. So sometimes what you hear is not ground truth or what's going on. There's lot of ammunition out there, but the normal process by which you order can take 30 to 45 days, but not with troops in contact.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: And D.J. Elliot.

Q Yes, Captain. This is D.J. Elliot with Long War Journal.

I was wondering about the RSUs in the national depot. How those are developing and a little more detail as to what they're going to look like in terms of how they're organized.

CAPT. PINE: Okay. I can give you a broad-brush on that.

One of the things that all along has been, I think, troublesome or maybe irritating for folks like us who are so dependent on our logistics and so engaged with it -- and I've said this in other forums -- as we're developing the Iraqi ground forces, we've been really focused -- they have been really focused, and therefore, we have -- on the trigger pullers, on combat arms, on getting guys out there to fight the COIN fight. And a lesser priority, because there's only so much capacity to train and develop, has been the logistics piece.

Well, one of the things that's happened just recently in the last week or two -- I suppose it is -- is a commitment from the Iraqis from the minister of defense on down, for how they want their logistics base to look like. And it really -- you know, you've probably heard, you know, RSUs and GSUs. And they're going to a new term called a base support unit, a BSU. And their plan is to have one of these large-supporting elements at each of the locations for each of the divisions. So in each division area there will be both a base support unit and a division-training center. And it's going to streamline and have synergies where these are all co-located and we don't have a -- well, I guess the real answer is for some period of time -- months, maybe years -- they haven't been able to buy-in -- we haven't got buy-in from the Iraqis on exactly how they their logistics support structure to work. We now have that, so part of it's already developed. More of it, MNSTC-I will help them develop.

And I don't have the details on me to tell you what a base support unit looks like in terms of x, y, z: numbers of bodies, the -- you know, the modified table of organization and equipment. But it will have supply. It will have maintenance.

It will have other facilities including ammunition in there to do the support for the division in whose battle space it resides.

Over.

MR. HOLT: Okay

Paul McCleary.

Q Hi, Captain Pine. Thanks for speaking to us today. It's Paul McCleary from cjr.org.

In your 10 months there, I'm just curious -- what are some of the biggest strengths or greatest weaknesses you see in the IAEA troops that you're dealing, say, from when you got to -- until now?

CAPT. PINE: Let's see.

I spend the vast majority of my time up at the headquarters level, so not down with the troops. But the thing that I see that is probably the most uplifting are the times that I have been out and been in the midst of the troops or had other folks on my team go out there and come back is the absolute, fantastic response that you see in the soldiers where they truly are nationalistic and supportive of Iraq. They are truly Iraqis. They don't like to think of themselves -- you've heard issues with sectarianism and what -- but they're not Sunnis and Shi'as and Kurds and any other mix or sect. They are Iraqis and it's really exciting to hear a two-or three-or four-star general go out there and talk in front of the troops at a recruit training center, at basic -- you know, as guys are finishing up basic combat training and just an -- inspirational, talking -- just to have the Iraqi soldiers there just cheering and being proud to serve their country.

It -- that is probably the most positive and uplifting thing that I've seen. And from a -- what is maybe the most -- you know, furthest behind or the greatest challenge or something I'd like to see, I think that part of that is probably the fact that their culture does not look at noncommissioned officers the same way our culture does in our military. You know, I'm a Navy man and I see the chief petty officer or the E-7 as the backbone of any organization in the Navy. Well, that's not true in the Iraqi Army. It's probably not true in many Arab or Eastern militaries. They don't hold their NCOs or their senior NCOs in the same esteem with which we do, and that's a hard thing to get your arms around after serving 25 years and knowing how important your senior enlisted leadership is to come here and see that it's just not their way.

And so we encourage them. We try to highlight that and we're having some success. But you won't see an E-5 equivalent in the Iraqi Army having the same level of authority, responsibility and accountability that you will in ours. And that's probably the biggest thing for me to get my head around.

Over.

Q Thanks.

Can I have a quick follow-up?

MR. HOLT: Sure.

CAPT. PINE: Sure.

Q I'm just curious if you're working with the Iraqis at all to try to instill greater self-reliance or responsibility at the lower levels.

CAPT. PINE: We are -- I think the -- probably the biggest effort that's in there and one of the things that the MNSTC-I Command sergeant major is actually pushing real hard is that that senior enlisted leader at the different organizations -- at IGFC, at the divisions, at the brigades and the battalions in the -- as a perfect example, one of the things that we're trying to get them to do kind of through osmosis and observation is when -- you know, when Lieutenant General Dubis (sp) goes out traveling in the appropriate fora, he brings his command sergeant major with him.

One of the things we're doing in our manning at the Joint Headquarters Transition Team is adding a command sergeant major to the list so that when our one-star who engages every day with the senior Iraqi leadership -- excuse me -- he'll bring his command sergeant major with him so they see how much we rely and how much authority and trust we invest in our senior enlisted leaders. And we're trying to convince them -- excuse me -- how important that can be for them, too.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

And Richard Lowry.

Q I'm just listening today.

MR. HOLT: Okay. All right.

I had a couple of other folks join us on the line. Who's there?

Q Jarred Fishman's here. MR. HOLT: Okay, Jarred. Go ahead.

Q Great.

Thank you, sir, for your time. Lieutenant Fishman from the Air Force Pundits.

My question is as we bring in more MRAPs, more advanced -- of our vehicles kind of replacing the old vehicles which we had in 2004-2005, is there a plan to train up the Iraqis so that they can take over and then not actually be able to run it, but run two and three years from now after we're starting to draw down the mechanics, the key ability to replenish their needs and be able to maintain an actual semi- armored force that can move?

CAPT. PIKE: Absolutely. It kind of is a follow-on to the fact that the focus -- the Iraqis' focus has been on combat arms for years and they're recognizing through -- you know, through our efforts as well that they need to increase their ability for self-sustainment, for the logistics. And there are, in fact -- there is a wheel maintenance facility and a track maintenance facility up at Kaji (ph). We're working on a -- an Iraqi Army maintenance plan where we're transitioning -- where the Iraqis are transitioning from contract maintenance to self-sufficiency maintenance where they're training more and more maintainers, if you will, at the third line shops. But they're also in -- an increased effort on sending folks through military occupational specialty qualification training to get trained as Level 1 and Level 2 maintainers down for the line units.

So one of the things they recognize is the fact that they need to be able to do more and more of that for themselves. You know, they have a fleet of

2,500 or 3,000 up-armored Humvees. But what they need to do is be able to do more and more for themselves. And that's one of the things that's actually exciting to see is the Iraqis are -- you know, they want to do things for themselves. They are -- they recognize that they have -- you know, a limited budget and contracting is expensive. And so they're trying to do it where they can reduce the expenditure on contracts and do it more for themselves.

Is it very well-developed? No, okay? They're not very robust. They don't have the same robust capabilities that our fighting forces have internal to their units. But some of that has been a focus where they haven't been focused on -- putting those soldiers through that training to get that kind of skills. They're doing it now. They're sending a lot more folks through vehicle maintenance schools, through cook schools, through a whole lot of specialty training all in an effort to towards -- movement towards self-sufficiency.

Over.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Any -- was there someone else on the line?

Q John Donovan from Castle Argghhh!!! But everybody else covered my pet rocks, which are NCOs, logistics and maintenance.

MR. HOLT: (Laughter.) All right, sir.

Were there any follow-up questions?

Q I've got one on training.

Is there any expansion of the training programs planned? And what's their current through-put on personnel?

CAPT. PINE: Well, they are expanding the Iraqi training base, which is designed to be able to produce more soldiers faster due to the nature of the security situations and trying to generate more forces. You know, the basic piece of that is basic combat training -- you know, to make your initial combat soldiers. But as well, they're working on that MOS Q training -- the Military Occupational Specialty Qualification training. They have -- I don't know what the count is. One of the other organizations under MNSTC-I actually has the folks down there at the training centers with all the different MOS Q training. But there's tens or twenties of schools -- different types of things that they train with programs of instruction.

And the issue they're doing now is actually sending soldiers through it so that they finish their initial combat training. They're plowing them back into the specialty training. So I think that what's important is the fact that they recognize the need for this and the security situation while still serious and still requires the generation of these combat forces, they actually are able to take a breath now, I think, and see the value in diverting some of these new soldiers into specialty training to give them that inherent capability -- that self-reliance on -- it's initially -- it's a small step. It's not across the board, all the things you'd like. But they do have things from combat medic, intel, different things in the food service industry, maintenance, armors, glasses and things.

So there are multiple different school programs of instruction that they are filling now, and I know that through the deputy Chief of Staff for training and the tactical Training Command, they're always thinking and looking

ahead for enhanced capability. So new things are some things that are taking making more interest that they're actually pushing right now is explosive ordinance disposal.

They actually have a FIDO training -- and I'm sorry, I only know the -- what the acronym -- but it's basically an explosive sniffer so they've got guys trained on that so they can use that to help them with their EOD and bomb disposal bit. We also have engineers -- live engineer stuff going on and the biggest push right now though is mechanics -- Iraqi army maintenance plan to do the maintenance on wheeled vehicles and track vehicles. Over.

MR. HOLT: Anyone else?

Q This is Richard Lowry. I did have a quick question. In months past there's been issues with electricity supply in Taji where there's a lot of training going on. Has that improved recently?

CAPT. PINE: I can't give you direct numbers because I'm not exactly sure. I can tell you that in general electricity, you know, across Iraq is improving -- the available electricity hours of power. I think the issue with Taji is I don't believe it's currently connected to the national grid and it works on generator farms, and they have various schools and various facilities there that have their own generator support to make that happen. So when -- until you get a facility of any kind on Taji or the entire Taji complex, which is absolutely huge, connected to the national grid you're going to be tied to depending on generators.

Now, there is work ongoing that I don't have the details on -- it's not happening at the joint headquarters level -- to work on a large generator farm or a large generator powered grid to try to link all or a large section of Taji together. I don't have much more on that other than I know that that's an effort. But it's common across the army and the joint forces is because of the fuel allocation from the Ministry of Oil because there isn't a whole lot of refined product extra around the country.

So one thing that they do is they focus all that fuel towards combat operations so what suffers if you don't have enough to meet your total requirement is the garrison units back home because they're not going to shortchange the guys out there on the pointy end of the spear. And that is problematic at places like schoolhouses and RSUs and BCTs, and it's a recognized issue and they doing (sic) all kinds of ingenious methods to get around when they don't have power -- from holding school outside, you know, in daylight instead of inside a cramped enclosed classroom with no power. So it requires some ingenuity on the part of the instructors at all the different schoolhouses but they use it and they're quite adept at making the adaptations as required. It's not perfect. We much prefer they had 100 percent power all the time but they don't have that in the country, let alone at those garrison units. Over.

MR. HOLT: All right. Okay. Anything else?

Q Yes, Paul McCleary. I was wondering if you could comment on the Iraqi leadership that you're dealing with -- who they are, what their top priorities are, you know, what they're undertaking, things like that.

CAPT. PINE: Well, the Joint Headquarters Transition Team deals specifically with all the senior leadership inside the joint headquarters from the chief of staff of the Iraqi joint forces, General Babakir Zebari, his vice

chief of staff, General Nasier Abadi, and the four deputy chiefs of staff for personnel, operations, logistics, and training, and that's who my folks that work in the JHQT that's who they engage with every day -- who they advise, mentor, coach, you know, liaise with. The things that really -- that the Iraqi joint headquarters are working on is varied as you might expect out of a high operational level low strategic level headquarters.

They're worried right now, of course, the counter insurgency fight which is the, you know, that five-meter target but they're also looking at probably -- the number one issue that's of concern to them outside of, you know, the fight is life support, self-reliance, their ability to take care of themselves in a self-reliant manner. They are -- they're leaning forward in terms of delegations of authority and responsibility. One of the things the joint headquarters wants to do is to devolve some of those powers and responsibility that right now are held at the highest level and they want to push it down to help ease some of the administrative burden, and that's actually a very positive step that we welcome because their organization and the Arab culture and the Iraqi culture is power is held at the very top and they don't -- and in the past haven't delegated that at all. Well, that's what they're looking to do now because they see it as more efficient. They see it as getting themselves out of the day-to-day and thinking more on that longer-term strategic kind of vision that you'd expect out of a joint headquarters. Over.

MR. HOLT: Okay. All right. Got a few more minutes. Anyone else? All right, sir. Captain David Pine, chief of staff, the Joint Headquarters Transition Team. Thank you very much for joining us. Do you have any closing comments -- closing thoughts for us?

CAPT. PINE: Yeah, just a couple things. We have a couple challenges or we see a couple challenges at the Joint Headquarters Transition Team and we kind of touched on it just there, which is striking the balance on the requirement for the Iraqi joint headquarter to focus on that near-term target of fighting the COIN fight and the security situation here near-term execution, if you will, versus the longer-term goal of a strategic vision of greater enhancements and developments in the joint headquarters. And, you know, eventually they'd like to see a lot less of us around and a lot more of just them around and, you know, quite frankly we'd all like that.

The final point is that it's important to recognize that there is a certain amount of cultural friction between, you know, the Western model that we all come from and the Iraqi way. We don't always know what's best for the Iraqis but we like to think we do. What I mean is sometimes the Iraqis do things for their own reasons in their own ways that can be just as effective and just as capable and get to the end state that we're all looking for. They just go about it differently, and sometimes that's hard for us to recognize when they're not approaching a problem with the same, you know, lens that we look at it. So I think that friction of, "Well, that's not how I would do it," -- that's one of the things our new people when they come in that we talk to a lot from a JHQT point of view is, hey, it may not be the way it was done back in your world but it may be the way that works here in -- if it's good enough for the Iraqis and it accomplished the mission we shouldn't be tied to Western models. Over.

MR. HOLT: Okay, sir. Thank you very much -- Captain David Pine, chief of staff, Joint Headquarters Transition Team. Thank you very much for joining us and we -- hopefully we can speak again in the future.

CAPT. PINE: All right. Been my pleasure. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you, sir.

END.